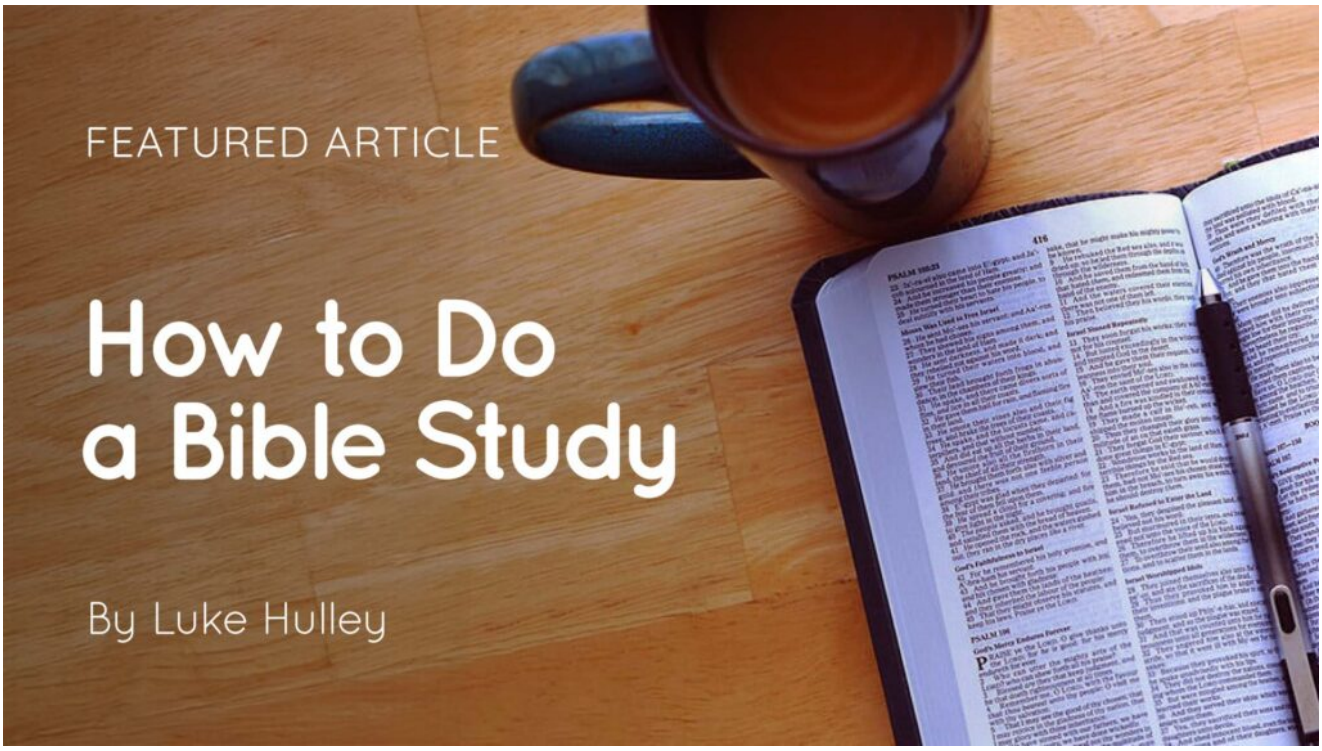
How To Do a Bible Study

Luke Hulley 16 January 2020



While conversing with people wrestling with big issues in their lives, I have often encouraged them to go and do a bible study on a topic. It was only much later that I realised that I really needed to qualify what I meant by that, because many young believers (and not a few older ones as well) simply went home and punched their question into Google and then watched the first couple of videos that popped up in the results!

There is a rich pleasure I wish to share with you here, and it is the ‘how to’ of mining through the treasures of God’s word for yourself. Many people have the desire to study the Word but simply lack the basic skills and so get easily intimidated. I wish to help start you on your way. So where to begin?

Choose Which Bible Study

There is a wide range of types of bible studies you can do, but I won’t bore you with an extensive list of them. In this article, I will only take you through how one does a ‘whole book study’. I have also written an article on how to do a ‘topic study’.

Whole Book Bible Study

A whole book study is when you pick a book of the Bible that you would really like to get a grip on and take some time over. This is a great form of study for devotional reading, because as you take the book in bite-sized chunks, you can meditate upon what you've learned and really apply it to your life. Another benefit is the continuity from day to day. It gets really exciting to wake up in the morning and continue from where you left off the previous day.

A whole book study is really how the Scriptures are intended to be studied, because you get the full context of the message as well as the whole message. With any other book we read it from beginning to end, and this is also how the books in the Bible were meant to be read. So often we can misinterpret what we read because we do not fully appreciate the context of the passage we are reading.

Get a Brief Background on the Book

Because each book of the Bible was written to achieve a specific purpose, it is important to get some basic background information on:

- The intended audience – which specific people did the author have in mind?
- Some of the issues being addressed and why
- The historical and geographical context of the audience

There is no need to do an exhaustive background study before getting stuck into the book itself. I usually refer to a study aid that can give a good overview of the book, like 'Unlocking the Bible' by David Pawson or even the background information in my study Bible preceding each book.

This will also help when reading from the Old Testament, because when we understand why a book was written and the circumstances of the intended audience, we will have a better idea of how to apply its truths into our own context.

2. Read Through the Book Without Any Aids

It's important to get a broad sweep of the book before you drill down into any particular passage in the book, so before I begin to study in earnest, I'll often skim through the whole book or listen to it read out on an audio bible website. This helps me to gain an idea of where the author is going with his points and prevents me from jumping to conclusions.

3. Make Your Own Chapter Summaries

Once you've quickly gone through the book, you can begin to go chapter by chapter and really spend some time unpacking the meaning. One way to do this is to put into your own words a summary of what the chapter is all about. This helps to get to the heart of what the author is trying to convey rather than getting side-tracked by some of the peripheral issues.

If you want to flesh out your study some more at this point, you can reference other passages or stories from the Bible which speak on the same topic and compare and contrast them with what you have just read.

I also like to copy down particular verses from the chapter I've just studied that meant a lot to me because I want to remember them and possibly reference them in future.

4. Application and Devotional

As you go through it, it is important that you internalise what you have learned. Ask yourself questions like: Is this what I really believe about God? What do I feel God saying to me? In which area of my life do I need to repent and trust God?

This is very important, because our ultimate goal in studying is not merely for information but for transformation!

5. Study Aids

When you have completed your study, you may want to reference other reputable Bible commentaries. As we study, we sometime stumble across hard-to-understand references because they are so culturally specific. Other times, we may encounter passages which seem to contradict what we have read elsewhere. At this point, referencing Bible commentaries can be invaluable.

There are some great commentaries that are free and very accessible online. My personal favourite is Biblehub.com. These online aids enable you to quickly find commentary on particular verses that you are reading.

Unfortunately, some people consult with commentaries as the first step in their study, but this spoils all the fun! If you consult commentaries too soon, they can also skew your interpretation of the text through the bias of the commentator. So rather only reference when you have wrestled with the text on your own first. If you find answers that you were looking for in the commentaries, you can then supplement these with your own notes.

A Final Word

Hopefully this resource will encourage you to dive into the Word and study it for all its worth. Doing a bible study does not have to be a daunting prospect and we shouldn't just leave it to the 'professionals'. As we study, we trust that the Holy Spirit will come alongside us and 'lead us into all truth'.

As you dig into the Word this year, I hope that you encounter the risen Jesus and that you are greatly encouraged in your faith.